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Democratization and Development

Alejandro Toledo ■ *Thomas Carothers*

Brian Levy ■ *Kenneth Wollack & K. Scott Hubli*

Liberation vs. Control in Cyberspace

Ronald Deibert & Rafal Rohozinski

What Does Democracy Mean?

Michael Bratton ■ *Tianjian Shi & Jie Lu* ■ *Larry Diamond*

Fares Braizat ■ *Yun-han Chu & Min-hua Huang*

April Longley Alley on Yemen's Multiple Crises

Mark Thompson on the Philippines

Richard Madsen on Religion in China

Nic Cheeseman on African Elections

Success Stories from “Emerging Africa”

Steven Radelet

THE UPSURGE OF RELIGION IN CHINA

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Over the years, these pages have featured many essays devoted to analyzing the prospects for democracy in China. Such analyses have focused on studying the resiliency (or fragility) of the current Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime, and on weighing the significance of various protest movements or other actual and potential sources within China of pressure for democratic change. Among the latter, attention has been devoted to workers, rural dwellers, the middle classes, and online activists. But very little note has been taken of what may turn out to be the biggest threat of all to the CCP's ability to maintain its control—namely, the extraordinary growth of religious belief and religious movements in Chinese society.

Unlike liberal democracies, which generally accord their citizens the right to complete freedom of religious belief and practice, the People's Republic of China claims that it needs to control religion in order to preserve social harmony and economic modernization. The government has a bureau that is officially in charge of religious affairs—the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA). The state claims the prerogative of determining what counts as “true” and “false” religion, and uses its police power to attempt the eradication of “false” religion (often termed, in the parlance of Chinese officialdom, “evil cults” or “feudal superstition”). The state also chooses the leaders of approved religions and monitors many religious activities.

The Chinese government shares an assumption that is often encountered in liberal democracies—namely, that secularity is inseparable from

modernity.¹ Liberal-democratic *governments* (as distinguished from various influential schools of thought found within liberal-democratic societies) are neutral on the matter, of course, and take no position on the question of whether religion has any future in the modern world. China's government is not neutral, but maintains instead that religion is destined to recede as modernization continues to proceed. Chinese officialdom derives its version of this "secularization thesis" from Marxism, and China's religious policy (like all government policy in that country) is set by the ruling CCP. The framework for religious policy comes from "Document 19," which the CCP's Central Committee promulgated in 1982 under the title "The Basic Viewpoint on the Religious Question During Our Country's Socialist Period."²

This document parallels the liberal-democratic handling of religious belief by relegating it to the private sphere of life: The "crux of the policy of freedom of religious belief is to make the question of religious belief a private matter, one of individual free choice for citizens." (Unlike liberal democracies, however, China has a constitution that offers no guarantee of freedom of association to complement freedom of belief.)

In a sharp contrast to the neutral, liberal-democratic approach to religious claims regarding what is true, however, Document 19 goes on to declare that religion is false, and makes government the active agent of a modernizing project that is meant to eventually eliminate religion altogether: "[W]e Communists are atheists and must unremittingly propagate atheism." In contrast to the "leftist" policies put in place during the Cultural Revolution that began in 1966—policies that tried forcibly to obliterate religion from public life—Document 19 is a product of the early Reform program of Deng Xiaoping, who was CCP leader from 1978 to 1992. Its approach toward religion is based on patiently waiting for scientific education, not political coercion, to spread atheism.

As suggested above, the notion that science and modernity will put an end to religion is not confined to Communist functionaries: It is in fact an assumption that elite social scientists in liberal democracies widely share. Until fairly recently, these social scientists would probably have overwhelmingly agreed with Document 19 that religion is a historical phenomenon whose demise will inevitably come with modernization, albeit probably not until a period of "cultural lag" has run its course: "Old thinking and habits," cautions Document 19, "cannot be thoroughly wiped out in a short period." Therefore, "Party members must have a sober-minded recognition of the protracted nature of the religious question under Socialist conditions. . . . Those who expect to rely on administrative decrees or other coercive measures to wipe out religious thinking and practices with one blow are even further from the basic viewpoint that Marxism takes toward the religious question. They are entirely wrong and will do no small harm."

The problem for the secularization thesis—and hence for the CCP—

is that it appears to be wrong. Far from inexorably receding, religions all over the world are growing and seeking increasingly vigorous engagements with public affairs. Recognizing this, many Western social theorists (even confirmed agnostics such as Jürgen Habermas) are now searching for “postsecular” social theories.³ Although there is great disagreement over the content of such theories, they all note that religions do not simply “rise and fall” according to a linear pattern. The theories also note that in modernized societies religion not only persists, but continues to evolve dynamically. Theorists now recognize that there are “multiple modernities,” defined by different interactions between religious belief and practice on the one hand, and modern political and economic developments on the other.⁴ It is generally conceded, moreover, that religion cannot typically be confined altogether to private life, but instead is (for better or worse) an active part of public life.⁵ Finally, scholars are growing increasingly suspicious of definitions that conceive of religion in overly narrow, ethnocentric terms based on Western historical experience.⁶

There are heated arguments and unresolved issues concerning religion and its relation to public life in liberal democracies such as the United States, of course, but these are at least openly debated. In China, the secularist assumptions that underpin official religious policy are proving unworkable. The policies that Document 19 lays out are a complete failure, even in terms of their own goals of constraining the growth of religion, confining it to the private sphere, and keeping it out of politics and ethnic relations. Religion is growing rapidly, and has overwhelmed the CCP regime’s systems of surveillance and control. Clumsy methods of suppressing unwanted forms of religion have backfired, raising rather than lowering the temperature of conflicts involving religion and the state. And attempts to decouple religion from the ethnic awareness of minority nationalities that might fuel opposition to the dominant Han nationality have failed as well. The policy debacle has become obvious enough that CCP leaders have begun to acknowledge it more or less openly, and some within the government are searching for a new approach to religious policy. But constraints on debate about sensitive religious matters are making it hard for the CCP and the state to move beyond the old policy, with its untenable assumptions; and when they do move, it is not in the direction of more liberal-democratic rights to religious freedom.

Official Policy and Social Reality

The problems with the official policy of containing religion, making it serve state aims, and keeping it within regime-approved channels start with the government’s attempts to define religion itself. Official policy views religion in terms of private belief expressed through volun-

tary participation in congregations organized via institutions that have clearly delineated leaderships separated from the economy and polity. This fits the understanding of religion developed by nineteenth-century Western scholars who, consciously or not, were working from a secularized notion of Western Protestantism. Based on this definition, the Chinese government recognizes five (and only five) religions in China: Taoism, Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism. At least some manifestations of all five are organized into distinctive institutions with recognized leaders, and are practiced through congregations of voluntarily associating believers.

The containment of religion is part of a policy that seeks to contain all the associations of a civil society. There is in principle no space in official Chinese policy for an independent civil society, and therefore no space for independent religious associations. The officially recognized institutions are thus placed under the supervision of “patriotic associations” that in turn are supervised by SARA, and above it the United Front Department of the CCP.

Yet SARA has no jurisdiction over any form of religion that has not received official recognition, even though such generally recognized world religions as Russian Orthodoxy, Judaism, Mormonism, and the Bahá’í Faith can all be found in China. Rural China, moreover, is home to millions of temples—many of them built in just the last decade—that serve as centers for local folk religions and their associated festivals. By no means do these temples and their liturgies represent a simple return to ancient traditions. Traditional rituals, myths, and practices are being enacted with modern technology such as video cameras and websites, and reconfigured to fit the sensibilities of villagers who are no longer farmers, but factory workers, entrepreneurs, and even professionals.⁷ These folk religions are more a matter of public practice than private belief, and they are not organized into institutions clearly separate from local economic and political life. Such activities have been defined by the Chinese authorities as “feudal superstition,” in contrast to real religion. But modern anthropologists would want to consider these activities, through which hundreds of millions of people in China seek fundamental meaning and celebrate community, as religious. In any case, none of these activities are under the purview of SARA, and there is confusion within the Chinese government about who should monitor them and what should be done about them. In fact, regulation of folk religion often depends on ad hoc arrangements by local officials, and different provinces follow different policies in handling its growth.

Even within the five officially recognized religions, moreover, most of the growth is taking place outside the state-supervised patriotic associations and hence not under the jurisdiction of SARA. For example, there is an extensive “underground” Catholic Church that is about three times larger than the officially recognized Chinese Patriotic Catholic Associa-

tion. And even more amazing from a sociological point of view, there is an extremely wide array of rapidly growing unregistered Protestant “house churches.”

When Mao Zedong and his Communists triumphed over the Nationalists and established the People’s Republic in 1949, there were fewer than a million Protestants in all of China. Under Mao, who died in 1976, restrictions on religion and the religious were severe. Since 1979, however, the ranks of Chinese Protestants have grown exponentially. A conservative estimate favored by many leading scholars of religion within China puts their strength at around fifty million.⁸ (Some Protestant leaders claim that there are really twice that number.) The vast bulk of this astounding growth has taken place outside the institutional bounds of the state-supervised Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM). The fastest-growing sectors of all have been those dominated by evangelical and Pentecostal Christian assemblies that hew to a premillennial theology positing the imminent end of the world, the “rapture” of the faithful into heaven, and the arrival of global tribulations heralding the second coming of Christ.

Although most new Chinese Christians concern themselves with spiritual matters and have no interest in active efforts to bring on the apocalypse, some sects do see their faith as a mandate to bring about radical change in this world. The Chinese government’s attitude toward unregistered Protestant “house churches” has been one of great suspicion, and it certainly does not like eschatological talk. It will also have noticed that a disproportionate number of those “rights lawyers” and other activists (including imprisoned dissident Liu Xiaobo) who have been pushing for political reforms are also Christians associated with urban house churches.⁹

The house churches have been growing so fast, however, that the government can neither stop them nor ignore them. Thus, parts of the government are trying to distinguish between those evangelical Protestants who take a relatively passive, spiritual stance toward their religious convictions and the minority with the potential for political confrontation. Since the Protestants outside the TSPM are not under the purview of SARA, however, other central-government agencies have been entering into discussions with those house-church leaders who seem to pose no danger to social stability and who want to distance themselves from the more militant religious activists. The Chinese State Council’s Development Research Center held an important meeting for such leaders—its title was “Christianity and Social Harmony”—in the latter part of 2008. Meanwhile, however, agencies of repression such as the Public Security Bureau take a less conciliatory approach and have been increasingly prone to arrest house-church leaders since the first half of 2009. But since there are too many leaders in too many decentralized organizations for even China’s security forces to arrest, the detentions seem arbitrary, with the great majority of house churches being unaffected.

Finally, there is the growth of new religious movements with flexible organizations that combine traditional social networks with sophisticated multimedia communications technologies. The best-known of these is the Falun Gong, which mixes Buddhist and Taoist ideas in a modernized form. Founded in 1992 as part of a wave of meditation practices for promoting spiritual harmony and physical health, the Falun Gong expanded rapidly to include perhaps ten-million followers by 1999.¹⁰ In April of that year, in response to criticisms in the national media, the Falun Gong gathered ten-thousand of its practitioners for a demonstration in front of the government headquarters in Beijing. Even though the demonstration was peaceful, CCP leaders considered it an illegal provocation and feared that it could set a precedent for more independent mass action.

Since the summer of 1999, the government has carried out a massive campaign to crush the movement, arresting and sometimes allegedly torturing and killing its leaders. Followers living abroad have organized their activities and publicized their plight through a newspaper (the *Epoch Times*), a television station (Tang Dynasty TV), and elaborate websites. Along with similar religious movements that have challenged the government's authority, the Falun Gong has been put into the category of "evil cults" that the state strives to crush by mobilizing new forms of police power on a vast scale, despite Document 19's warning that harsh coercive measures are "wrong and will do no small harm." The Falun Gong has been driven deep underground within China, yet at the same time it has become a force worldwide. Meanwhile, other "evil cults," including offshoots of Christianity, continue to spread.¹¹

Back to the Future?

The first response to the breakdown of the old policies has been to tolerate different experimental, ad hoc responses to local religious developments, while officially maintaining the framework of Document 19. But in the absence of any unified theoretical approach to guide them, these responses produce an incoherent patchwork of disparate local policies. Moves to tolerate some religious activities are joined with new methods of repressing others. There does not seem to be much central coordination of these developments, and they proceed at their own respective paces according to the ambitions of the various bureaucratic units that initiate them. Recognizing the incoherence of its ad hoc policies, the Party is looking for a new understanding to guide its approach toward religion.

As with all "sensitive" issues in China, discussions about religious policy go forward not in public forums, but rather in closed-door meetings that bring together academic experts and political leaders. While spending a year at Fudan University in Shanghai not long ago, I myself was invited to give a lecture to one such group, the United Front Department of the

Fudan University Communist Party Committee, which has been designated a “theoretical base” for developing policies toward religion.

My sense, from that experience and other interactions I had in China, is that leading Chinese experts agree on the unworkability of Document 19. Whether top CCP leaders will openly admit this is doubtful, given the Party’s need to maintain an air of infallibility. But whether it is spelled out or not, the Party’s strategy seems to be evolving along the lines suggested by leading experts such as Zhuo Xinping, the director of the Institute of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Zhou’s paper on “The Situation of Chinese Religion and Its Direction of Development” has been presented to the CCP Politburo. He begins with a long introduction on the place of religion in Chinese history and the relationship between religion and the state under the emperors. He discusses Marxism, but treats it as social science—subject to all the canons of empirical verification and so on—not as sacred dogma. When things are handled this way, it is the emperors and not Karl Marx who provide the touchstone for religious policy.

What is gradually emerging from all this is a somewhat more coherent policy that differs from Document 19 in being more accepting of many of the different forms of Chinese religiosity and more flexible in seeking to regulate them. But it is by no means a liberal-democratic policy. Instead, it is a back-to-the-future policy—a modern throwback to the viewpoint of the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1912) imperial dynasties.

In Ming and then Qing China, the emperor was the “Son of Heaven.” His main duty was to mediate between Heaven (considered a deity) and Earth. The legitimacy of his authority rested on this sacral role, which of course depended on a “Mandate of Heaven” that could be lost through imperial malfeasance. The emperor fulfilled his role by performing important rituals in the capital and elsewhere in order to secure Heaven’s blessings for his subjects, and he had the ultimate authority to distinguish between “true teaching” (*zhengjiao*) and “deviant teaching” (*xiejiao*). He thus combined the Western roles of king and pope.

Although the elites who furnished emperors with their chief advisors were schooled in a Confucian tradition that was skeptical about most forms of popular religious practice, the emperors often tolerated and even encouraged village cults, which usually drew on some mixture of Taoist, Buddhist, and Confucian traditions. Such rituals and myths would count as “true teachings” if they solidified the proper hierarchical relations within families, helped to build strong communities rooted in local agriculture, and thus bolstered social stability under imperial rule. As for large-scale Buddhist and Taoist monasteries, the emperors kept them in line through imperial patronage, which helped such institutions to thrive while ensuring that their leaders remained imperial loyalists.

By contrast, sectarian organizations that gathered people from different communities, contravened gender distinctions by allowing men and

women to worship together as equals, preached an imminent end to the present era, and sometimes became the organizational basis for rebellion might be labeled heterodox (or in the English translation of the term *xiejiao* that is officially preferred today, “evil cults”).¹² Their fate would be intense persecution.

Often the facts that might justify this distinction were ambiguous. When

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Jesuit missionaries such as Matteo Ricci brought Catholic Christianity to China in the sixteenth century, there was considerable debate within the imperial court about whether this “foreign teaching” should be considered orthodox or heterodox. The Jesuits eventually convinced the emperor that their teaching was compatible with the other teachings that sustained imperial rule, and the long-ruling Kangxi emperor declared in

1692 that Catholicism would count as an “orthodox teaching.” But when, in what has become known as the “Chinese-rites controversy,” Pope Clement XI ruled against the Jesuit missionaries’ interpretation of what was acceptable for Chinese converts and thus contradicted the judgment of the emperor, Kangxi denounced Christianity as a heterodox teaching. Designations of orthodoxy and heterodoxy could change, but the infallible arbiter of such distinctions was always the emperor.¹³ As Zhuo Xinping has noted, the basic imperial policy toward religion was that “the government is the master, religion is the follower” (*zhengzhu, jiaocong*).

In 2008, Xi Jinping, the CCP leader who is the presumptive successor to current general-secretary Hu Jintao, declared that the Party was now a “ruling party” rather than a “revolutionary party.”¹⁴ The CCP will now justify itself by driving China’s economic development, defending its territorial integrity, and promoting its rich cultural heritage. The regime’s main slogan now lauds the “harmonious society,” a notion with Confucian echoes. Harmony is said to depend above all on “social stability.” In religious affairs, at least, it is imperial hierarchs and not Marx and Lenin who furnish the models to be followed.

The new line suggests that the state will tolerate a wide range of religious practices under the rubric of respecting “cultural pluralism.” In line with official pronouncements, scholars such as Zhuo insist that the cornerstone of religious policy is the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom. But this is not freedom as understood in the Western liberal tradition. In some ways, the Chinese policy gives *more* support to religion than is the norm in countries such as the United States, where church and state are strictly separated and the latter may provide no direct economic support to the former.¹⁵ In China, the government pays religious functionaries their salaries and funds the building of church-

es—provided that the functionaries and the churches alike belong to one of the officially accepted patriotic associations.

This government patronage is in line with the imperial state's custom of doling out patronage to temples. This is not a liberal toleration, based on an unalienable right to freedom of religious association. Rather, it is a modern manifestation of the old imperial principle that the state is the master, and religion is the follower. The state reserves for itself the prerogative of determining which practices make up orthodox "true religion" and which betoken a heterodox "evil cult." (In 2008, the Propaganda Department produced a video that made just this kind of distinction.) The state's chief criterion is the religion's practical effect: Does it or does it not contribute to a "harmonious society" under the direction of the party-state? In order to be fully legitimate, the official thinking goes, religions must work actively to build the harmonious society. If they are not working actively toward this end, the state must guide them so that they do fulfill their obligations. If they refuse to accept guidance, the state must crush them.

In its new incarnation, the supposedly secular CCP assumes a holy aura. It now presents itself as the carrier of a sacred national destiny. It carries out spectacular public rituals such as the opening ceremonies of the 2008 Beijing Olympics—ceremonies that powerfully evoked the glorious cultural heritage of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, but gave no mention at all to Mao Zedong or even to socialism.

This can lead to new patterns of religious tolerance and repression. Village temples and festivals that were once suppressed as examples of "feudal superstition" are now permitted and even encouraged, as long as they keep villagers happy and perhaps draw in some tourism. Like the imperial government of old, the CCP is partial to polytheism—a multitude of local cults keep rural society divided and incapable of mass action. Christianity is more problematic; it is a foreign religion, not part of the Chinese cultural heritage. But as long as Christian groups thoroughly indigenize—which in practice means that they accept the principle that the government is the master, religion the follower—they can be accepted. Even local house churches may be tolerated if they preach strong families and hard work and avoid challenging the police forces of the harmonious society. The encouragement of local folk religion seems to have slowed the recent growth of evangelical Christianity in the countryside. The Christian God then becomes one in a pantheon of local gods among whom the rural population divides its loyalties.

With the collapse of a religion policy based on the presumed inevitability of secularization, the CCP is thus falling back upon the old scripts of an enchanted imperial age. This may not work, however, because the Chinese state is ironically both too strong and too weak for it.

The modern state has the power to subject society to much more complete surveillance and control than did the imperial state. In order to fulfill its sacral ambition to exercise a modern Mandate of Heaven, the Commu-

nist party-state must attempt to exert that control. In imperial China, some religious practices gave people a chance to withdraw to spaces that were beyond the state's reach, but also so marginal as to be politically harmless. Now, because of the very success of the Chinese state in extending its power, free space is so rare that even the attempt to retreat to it can seem like resistance. Moreover, events at the margins of society can now affect state power. Finally, because of the very communications technologies with which the modernizing government has criss-crossed China, marginalized groups can forge ties, exchange ideas, and influence one other. If these groups eventually end up undermining the CCP regime, that outcome will have come to pass at least in part because the regime had inadvertently laid down some of the conditions for its own destruction.

As the evolution of grassroots religion in China grows more dynamic, the government must now decide which of the churning changes in religious life are orthodox and which are not. Scholars and officials concerned with religious affairs are adopting the Chinese-American sociologist Fenggang Yang's idea that there are "red" (legitimate), "black" (illegitimate), and "grey" markets for religion.¹⁶ The government's task is to sort the points of "grey" into clear-cut "red" and "black." Yet the "grey" market is so huge and diversified that this is very hard to do, and in any case it would require a degree of expertise that is in short supply in China.

The second problem stems from the Chinese government's inability to seal China off and completely control all its relationships with the outside world. The emperors could choose not to tolerate foreign faiths whose leaderships lay beyond imperial control. But in an age of globalization, the Chinese government cannot easily stop such faiths from influencing China.

Challenges of Religious Globalization

The Ming and Qing emperors had problems with universalist religions whose teachings transcended the boundaries of any particular empire and indeed could be invoked to call earthly rulers to account. Such religions could be tolerated only if thoroughly "indigenized"—that is, made supportive of established social order and imperial rule. Even religions that aspire to universalism can become all too easily absorbed into the immanent power structures of this world, of course. In the nineteenth century, both Catholic and Protestant Christianity came to China on the heels of Western imperialism and played a role in justifying colonialist projects that in Chinese eyes made the era a "century of shame" never to be permitted again. In the twenty-first century, by contrast, the flow of universalist religious movements into China—Christianity, Islam, and globalized forms of Buddhism—is mostly the result not of imperialist power politics but of the fluidity of networks and the porosity of borders in an age of global hypercommunication. Yet the Chinese government

still worries—not without cause—that foreign governments might use the promotion of universal religions for the purpose of fomenting “color revolutions” that would undermine the party-state.¹⁷

As China rises to world-power status, its rulers seek to showcase its glory by exporting their country’s “nonmaterial cultural heritage” around the globe. The government is establishing “Confucian institutes” to teach

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Chinese language and culture in Europe and the Americas. State-sponsored films, art troupes, and other efforts celebrate the Chinese past, including the legacies of Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism—all interpreted in ways that comport with the dominant Han Chinese culture and the state’s preferred “government master, religion follower” formula. The regime appears to have few qualms about importing foreigners’

“nonmaterial cultural heritage” in the form of globalized popular culture, but remains highly wary of absorbing global religious culture, especially to the degree that it may be influenced by authorities outside China.

Christianity, Islam, and Tibetan Buddhism all pose severe challenges to the CCP’s neoimperial sacral hegemony. Although in many respects the Chinese Catholic Church has been indigenized, its theology still commits its leadership to be loyal to the pope. The Chinese government concedes that Catholics can accept Rome’s “spiritual” authority, but it reserves the right to draw the exact line between spiritual and temporal. The pope, of course, thinks that Rome knows the proper boundary. For the state, global communications make the threat of foreign influence on the Catholic Church ever harder to eliminate. Negotiations between the Chinese government and the Vatican about normalizing diplomatic relations have been going on fitfully for more than two decades, but they are currently at an impasse. The main problem is that the Vatican seeks more religious freedom for Catholics than the government is willing to give. And the Chinese government is afraid that even if the Vatican formally agrees to its conditions, the pope has enough spiritual authority to influence Catholics in ways beyond the government’s ability to control.

Protestant Christianity in China is much more decentralized, and does not pose the threat of a centralized ecclesiastical power attempting to impose its version of orthodoxy on Chinese believers. But as a global faith, it too is open to influence spread through modern media (and often carried directly by missionaries) from around the world. Thus, however indigenized Protestant Christianity becomes in China, it will remain in touch with spiritual movements from abroad. A completely secular liberal government would not have much problem with such cosmopolitan religious influence, but a government that claims a modern Mandate of Heaven cannot in principle

tolerate it. The likeliest prospect is that the CCP will work on two fronts, trying to restrict Christianity's spread while also fostering indigenous folk religion as a rival. The restrictions, however, will most likely prove ineffective. Christianity will keep growing, China's ruling elite will keep arguing internally about how to respond, and the upshot will be a grab bag of seemingly arbitrary, incoherent policies toward Christianity.

From its beginnings, Buddhism transcended all boundaries of kinship and nation, but most of the Buddhism practiced by the Han Chinese in mainland China is closely identified with Han Chinese culture, and its leaders have been very willing to accept guidance from the state. The problem for the CCP is Tibetan Buddhism, which over the last fifty years has surged beyond the boundaries of Tibetan and Mongolian nationality and become a world religion, with enthusiastic devotees in the Americas, Europe, and elsewhere. Since his 1959 flight into exile, the Dalai Lama has become a global celebrity, welcomed and respected as a great spiritual leader by popes, kings, publics, and presidents. Both his office and his charisma bring him huge respect from most Tibetans, who already have plenty of nonreligious reasons to resist Han Chinese colonialism. But their allegiance to a faith whose most revered leader is beyond the control of the Chinese state makes their resistance even more threatening in the eyes of the Chinese government. According to the logic of sacral imperial rule, all lamas should accept the suzerainty of the Chinese emperor, even though in practice they might have wide leeway in their religious affairs. Following the logic of sacral emperors, the CCP is not content merely to dispute the Dalai Lama's positions on Tibet, but seeks thoroughly to demonize the man. He is portrayed as equal in evil to Osama bin Laden, a person utterly devoid of any claim to spiritual leadership. Given the Dalai Lama's immense and far-flung popularity, such attacks are counterproductive. They merely alienate global public opinion and, if anything, increase the religious zeal of embattled Tibetans.¹⁸

A final challenge to the CCP's neoimperial sacral hegemony comes from Islam.¹⁹ The Qing dynasty in the nineteenth century and the Republican government in the 1930s both faced uprisings from the Uyghur minority that inhabits China's far-western region of Xinjiang. The Uyghurs are Muslims, but the Islamic religion was not necessarily the major cause of previous rebellions among these Turkic people. Indeed, they practiced a variety of strands of Islam that divided rather than united them. But globalization has brought Uyghur Muslims into contact with worldwide Islamic movements.

There are pragmatic reasons for the Chinese government to worry about the radicalism that might come with such a religious revival, but the reaction against it seems so extreme as to be counterproductive. In the name of suppressing "separatism," some Chinese authorities have begun to attack Islamic practice itself. During Ramadan in 2008, for example, they forced Uyghur men to shave their beards, restricted access

to mosques, and discouraged ritual fasting. This perhaps can only be explained in terms of the affront that a globalized Islam poses to neoimperial sacral hegemony. Such actions serve to add religious grievances to the many others that Uyghurs have against Han Chinese and could drive Uyghur movements closer to global movements of political Islam. It does not seem that such connections were made during the Uyghur uprisings of July 2009. But the Chinese government's general hostility to globalized Islam adds dangerous fuel to the fires of ethnic resentment.

With its "Great Firewall" of Internet filtering and massive surveillance resources, the Chinese party-state can inhibit the influence of universalizing religious movements, but it cannot block them completely. Moreover, even partial repression of such influences exposes China to censure from increasingly assertive global movements for religious freedom.

This will be confounding to a policy modeled on the sacral hegemony of premodern Chinese emperors. The one way to keep universalizing global religious movements from undermining that policy is for China to become so powerful that it can set the terms of its relationship with the rest of world. Then it can use its military and economic might to enforce its claim that universal standards of religious freedom do not apply to China and that universal religions can enter China only if they accept the "government master, religion follower" principle. Some political leaders think that they can accomplish this.

If they do completely succeed, they might one day come to regret it, because the accumulated pressure from frustrated religious believers could become explosive. The likelihood, however, is that China's political authorities will succeed only in part, and will experience ongoing frictions with global proponents of religious freedom. One can easily imagine grim scenarios of intensified conflict over religion's relationship to the state. In more auspicious scenarios, however, such international frictions will drive all sides to seek better ways of balancing the rights of increasingly assertive religions with the requirements of governance in a postsecular world.

NOTES

1. See Daniel Bell, "The Return of the Sacred: An Argument on the Future of Religion," in *The Winding Passage: Essays and Sociological Journeys, 1960–1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 327.

2. Translated in Donald E. MacInnis, *Religion in China Today: Policy and Practice* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1989), 8–26. In the nearly three decades since Document 19's promulgation, additional regulations regarding religion have supplemented it, but these have all been within the framework that Document 19 lays out.

3. See Jürgen Habermas, *Rationality and Religion: Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002). See also the introduction to Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, *Rethinking Secularism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

4. Shmuel Eisenstadt, ed., *Multiple Modernities* (New York: Transaction, 2002).
5. Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
6. Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, ed., *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).
7. Kenneth Dean, "Local Communal Religion in South-east China," in Daniel L. Overmyer, ed., *Religion in China Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 32–52.
8. Yu Jianrong (Institute of Rural Development, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences), "Religious Demography and House Churches, 2008," *Compass Direct News Service*, 3 July 2009.
9. Gerda Wielander, "Bridging the Gap? An Investigation of Beijing Intellectual House Church Activities and Their Implications for China's Democratization," *Journal of Contemporary China* 18 (November 2009): 849–64.
10. David A. Palmer, *Qigong Fever: Body, Science, and Utopia in China* (London: Hurst, 2007), 260–61.
11. The best-known "heterodox" Christian sect is the Eastern Lightening, which began in Henan Province, is quite strong in Shaanxi, and now seems to be spreading in Wenzhou. It has a female leader whose followers consider her a reincarnation of Jesus. There are at least ten other such quasi-Christian sects, with names like "The Established King," "The Lord God Sect," and "Three Ranks of Servants." See Richard Madsen, "Chinese Christianity: Indigenization and Conflict," in Elizabeth J. Perry and Mark Selden, eds., *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict, and Resistance*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2010), 246.
12. The term *xiejiao* has usually been translated in the English-language scholarly and historical literature as "heterodoxy." The phenomenon does not necessarily conform to the definition of a "cult" in a modern sociological sense. But official Chinese translations of the term into English render it as "evil cult," probably to intimate sinister connotations that would seem to justify crackdowns on such activities.
13. Richard Madsen, *China's Catholics: Tragedy and Hope in an Emerging Civil Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). See also Richard Madsen, "Catholicism as Chinese Folk Religion," in Stephen Uhalley, Jr., and Xiaoxin Wu, eds., *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), 233–49.
14. He first made this statement in a speech at the Central Party School in Beijing on 1 September 2008. The speech was later reprinted in the school's official newspaper.
15. Zhuo Xinping, *Quanqiuhuade zongjiao yu Dangdai Zhongguo* (Global religions and contemporary China) (Beijing: Shehuikexue wenxian chubanshe, 2008), 30. A major mission of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences is to give scholarship-based advice to China's central government.
16. Fenggang Yang, "Red, Black, and Grey Markets for Religion in China," *Sociological Quarterly* 47 (February 2006): 93–122.
17. Zhuo Xinping, *Quanqiuhuade*, 174.
18. Melvyn C. Goldstein, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon: China, Tibet, and the Dalai Lama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
19. Dru Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard East Asian Monographs, 1996).